

## Contributions

### ON SOCIAL AND NATIONAL RELATIONS

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The week of prayer will have accomplished much if by its observance the Christian world shall be brought to a heartier appreciation of the need of definiteness in prayer. Prayer may become a very formal thing; and when prayer degenerates into a mere form the danger is that it will be ceased altogether. Prayer is a real thing and real prayer is sure to bring the answer. The scriptures teach that prayer is as pleasing to God as it is indispensable to man. God only does and can use men and women of prayer. The prayers of individuals, and churches, are God's evidences that the time is full for an outpouring of the Spirit. Prayer, too, must be made in harmony with the will and purposes of God. Prayer is often unavailing because the prayer is made amiss. This does not make prayer a difficult task because God has made known his will touching the individual and the world thru Jesus Christ. This revelation we have as well as the Holy Spirit to illuminate and apply it. These are two necessary conditions of prayer. In the light of these two can we pray with confidence the prayer of the afternoon? Certain it is that we can pray definitely since we appreciate the need of the Christianization of all our social and national relations. But is it God's will that we should so pray and work? Is there a social aspect to the teachings of Jesus or are they wholly individualistic? Is the church set only for the salvation and culture of the souls of men, or does it embrace the whole community of people in the whole range of their activities? We can not so limit the teachings of Jesus. We maintain that Christianity is primarily a life, and only secondarily a system of doctrines, public worship and clerical government. The failure of Theology since the reformation has been its extreme individualism. Bunyan's pilgrim was concerned about his escape from eternal punishment. Here too is the failure of the otherwise Christian classic, "The Imitation of Christ", by Thomas a. Kempis. Church membership has been looked upon as an insurance policy against the fires of the next world. In consequence, paradoxical as it may seem religion became un-moral. Religion had nothing whatever to do with business politics, the press, art and education. There was no such thing as religion between Sundays.

But a change is gradually taking place. The social aspect of the teachings of Jesus is everywhere receiving much study. It has been found that He was more than a teacher of morals and religion. Christianity as founded upon the teachings of Christ and his disciples is looked upon as a distinctly social movement. The danger is that the world may swing to the opposite extreme; but it is nevertheless true that the unmodified individualism of the past is doomed. The world today is viewing all things from the

socialistic rather than the individualistic position. Man can not be thought of as capable of isolation. *Unus homo, nullus homo.* "Man is what he is by virtue of his relations to what he is not." Reformers from Plato to Bellamy have appreciated this and set themselves to place man in right relations with the forces and persons about him. Christ came that He might place men in right relation with God, with nature and his fellow-men. No student of scriptures will not admit this statement of Christ's purpose in the world. He came that the world might have life and that too in abundance. Life! life! life! was the cry of Christian as he fled from the city of destruction. His was a universal cry. An irresistible instinct impels man forward to life. That life might be increased and enriched is the aim and end of all human activity and association. Life is what men are hungering for today. Failure to obtain it is the cause of the world's unrest. The old ideals will no longer satisfy. The creed of the sixteenth century can not contain the ideals of the opening years of the twentieth century. The world today demands that religion shall stand for the preservation and enrichment of life rather than a mere saving and insuring the soul against a world yet to be. But life means correspondence. Man can not exist alone. His life therefore will be as his associations. Since this is true it follows that the associations of men must be Christianized. The church must then emphasize man's concrete and essential relations to God as manifested in nature and human society rather than his formal and abstract relations to God as an external ruler. In this is our only hope and basis for social reform. Christianity has already vindicated its claim to stimulate, to inspire and to lead the world's progress. It must ever be, from its very nature, in advance of the world presenting a good both to the individual and the nation. A narrower conception of Christianity than this can be productive only of evil consequences. Christianity can solve our social problems despite the sneers of skeptical reformers and is set for this very purpose the hopeless and senseless wails of the pessimist. Everywhere God treats the national as an individual. It is responsible to Him for its actions and non actions. Its end is moral and when it fails to reach it God completely destroys it and gives its place to another. Read history. Is this not the cause why one nation after another fell? Will the nation that is selfish, depraved and that thwarts the purpose of God continue and the individual alone go down beneath His stern and inviolable decree? Nations certainly are judged as all individual men will be. Moreover a high standard of national righteousness is set before us in the scriptures. The gospel is set for the salvation not of the isolated individual but of the individual in the nation; and the nation is to be saved not by itself and for itself, but as one in the whole family of nations. In short the whole world is the subject of salvation.

We can then pray with confidence that the spirit of Christ may more and more permeate and determine our social and national relations. To so pray is to bring ourselves into harmony with God's purpose for the world. Prayer indeed, at its best analysis is communion with the will and thought of God and its answer comes from Him. Prayer lifts our individual desires up into the larger relations to the will of God; and is as real a communion with God and brings as real and as definite an answer as did the disciples of Jesus when He was present with them in the flesh.

Even when all this has been said we must regard prayer as a substitute for effort. Indeed one way in which prayer finds an answer is in increased effort upon our part and of others to bring about that for which we pray. Prayer if real, always brings renewed courage and confidence. It is, again, God's appointed means by which our individual wills become consciously united to His large and noble purposes for the world. We need then to know that it is God's will and purpose that His Spirit should pervade all human activities, that there is a social aspect and end in the teachings of Christ; and that it is our blessed privilege thru prayer to cooperate with God in the achieving of His purpose for the world. This will bring us all to become ministers of Christ. The person that has superior social gifts will become a minister of Christ in placing society on a Christian basis. Art will become Christian and the artist will become one of the most potent of the ministers of Christ. Science will be pursued as a Christian calling and the scientist will take his place among the prophets of God.

Literature will be purified and elevated and he that has the gift to work well will look upon his gift as a call to serve God. Business and industry will be redeemed. Cooperation and profit-sharing will take the place of fierce and soulless competition. Public office, whether in city, state or nation will be looked upon as a trust held from God and the people; and the holder is guilty of a violation of a sacred trust if he does not endeavor in every way to bring the kingdom of God into his sphere. The problem as to the relation between state and church will then find its solution. The vicious line of cleavage between things secular and sacred will be obliterated. All life is one and therefore, sacred. The attempt therefore, to establish the social and political relations, on a Christian basis has not only the divine sanction, but it is the grandest work given to man. With much confidence and hope can we then pray and work that more and more the spirit of Jesus may pervade and determine all social and political relations, to the end that our daily prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." When this comes to pass we may expect a reformation more glorious and far-reaching than that of the sixteenth century.